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South Carolina trains with Japanese Army in Exercise North Wind

By Army Spc. Brad Mincey

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With tired feet, sore backs and weary hearts, South Carolina Soldiers wrapped up Exercise North Wind 2010 at the Ojojibara Maneuver Area in Sendai, Japan, and headed home.

"I wish we had more than two weeks to train with the Japanese Army," said Sgt. 1st Class Sammie Robertson, whose sentiments were echoed by many of his fellow Guardmembers assigned to the 1-118th Combined Arms Battalion (CAB).

"Japan is our ally. They are on our side and on our team. This deployment allows me to get my Soldiers out of the same routine and provides some adventure for them," said Lt. Col. Michael Krell, the battalion commander.

In addition to receiving essential cold-weather training from the Japanese, U.S. Soldiers shared their knowledge of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare survival training and combat lifesaving. Many of the Guardmembers also exchanged patches and rank insignia with Japanese soldiers.

An exchange of cultures happened as well, with Guardmembers visiting a local Buddhist temple and enjoying a local Japanese restaurant. Most agreed there was so much more they wanted to see and explore during their time in Japan.

"By building these relationships, if we are ever on the battlefield together, we will know each other's capabilities and can say we've trained with these guys and know what they can do," said Krell.

"This will help build trust with our militaries because you never know when we are going to be on the battlefield together," said the battalion's Command Sgt. Maj. Roger Watson.

Watson said the cold weather training was one of the biggest benefits of the mission and on past deployments they saw strong variances in temperature.

Another important aspect of the training consisted of a company movement to contact. The Soldiers moved in a coordinated attack with

the Japanese Army and took out an enemy. Each element had its own type of formation; the Americans used a "wedge" formation where the Japanese used a "hishigata" (diamond) formation. The basic idea was the same – move from one point to the next while keeping a secure perimeter.

Krell said the movements gave them an opportunity to work through the language barrier and although their techniques may be a little different, the goals are the same. He added many Soldiers felt the effects of the foot movements on their knees, using bandages and pain medication.

"It is a totally different animal than doing regular woodland-type training in the spring- or summer-time," said Spc. Billy Hanby, rifleman and Bradley fighting vehicle driver. "You have to make sure you are drinking a lot of water because even though you don't sweat as much, you have to keep hydrated."

Some friendly competition was also held between the two forces. One day, there was a marksmanship competition where Soldiers shot 10 rounds at 300 meter targets in less than 25 seconds. In the evening, colorful origami shuriken (paper ninja stars) were thrown at targets for prizes.

"Operation North Wind was one of the best short exercises I have ever participated in," said Watson. "We packed every day with something to do. Our Soldiers will take this experience in Japan with them for the rest of their lives."



Top: Sgt. Michael Johnson provides security during patrol-movement training on Ojojibara Maneuver Area, Sendai, Japan. Middle: Infantryman instruct Japanese soldiers on the use and technical characteristics of the M-203 grenade launcher. Right: Soldiers clear a trench during the conclusive phase of a company-level simulated attack. Far right: A Soldier provides supporting fire. (Photos by Sgt. Roberto Di Giovine)



Other states training with Japan...

➡ Soldiers from the **NEW YORK** Army National Guard's 42nd Infantry Division deployed to northern Japan for a battle simulation exercise called Yama Sakura late last year. **COLORADO**'s 169th Fires Brigade participated as well.

➡ **NEW YORK**'s 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, participated in Exercise Orient Shield in the fall with Japanese troops for a simulated combat field training exercise.

➡ The **ALASKA** Air National Guard trained two members from the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force in January on air refueling operations on the HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter.

➡ **CALIFORNIA** Air Guard members from the 129th Rescue Wing teamed up for refueling training with Japanese pilots at Moffett Federal Airfield, Calif., in December 2009.

